

Intentional Training—A Strategic Initiative

by *Stephane McShane, Maxim Consulting*

Training done with the desire to increase both skills and employee morale is certainly well intended. The effectiveness of programs vary widely based on whether a short term or long term approach is deployed. There is a choice whether to develop training in house as a corporate university, or to outsource the development, if needed.

The most effective training creates synergy between process definition, technology deployment, and employee engagement. This is an enterprise level, structured approach to gain the traction necessary to evoke real change.

Defining Success—Starting with The End Game

To create educational programs that will have lasting impact, we must first ask some very specific questions to build the proper foundation necessary for success.

1. Why is this training necessary?
2. What are the goals of this training?
3. Have best practices surrounding this work been defined?
4. Who needs this training?
5. How is the training program created?
6. How will we know if this training is successful?
7. Who will lead this training and in what format?

Why is this training necessary?

This is the pivotal question that must be answered to determine whether training is even required. The answer must be clear and extremely specific. If we ask this question, and the answer is, "We want the employees

to make us more profit," that is not an actionable needs statement. This is a question, based in fact, focusing on the problem of lack of knowledge or skill, or lack of defined standard practice, not on whether the people are doing their job "correctly." Utilizing change order management as an example, an answer to this question might be, "Project managers are performing change order management differently, causing wide variations in both risk management and profitability."

What are the goals of this training?

The goals of any training are to create consistency and success in work practice. This discussion must also center around the topic of the benefit to the attendees themselves and to the organization if we learn and implement a new, consistent skill. With that in mind, what are the three to five highlighted practices that are desired for each attendee to leave with? These three to five items should lead us directly to the goals and be the foundational outline for your training. Again, utilizing change order management as an example, the goals might be to identify, prepare, price, process and negotiate change orders. Workflow surrounding each of these segments of the process could be easily determined, giving us a strong foundation for transparency and trainability.

Have best practices surrounding this work been defined?

This point alone seems to be a big challenge for many construction organizations. If workflow has not been defined and deployed correctly, then inconsistencies in performance

are commonplace. It's not sufficient to have just the work steps defined, but who is performing each one of those steps. If we have already answered the question on whether training is needed and that answer is yes, likely there is a deficiency in workflow definition or implementation, or both. An example of a workflow document is shown in Figure 1.

This example depicts each of the major work steps involved in a lump sum change order. As additional information is needed, we can insert video links, examples, or templates directly into the workflow in the bottom section called documents and templates. At this point, it would be imperative to evaluate whether technology has been implemented correctly for the given process. This is the time to make those critical definitions in properly utilizing technology. Avoiding the pitfalls of implementing a flawed process would be wise as trust and faith are costly to lose. If there are any timing requirements involved in this process, we can insert those requirements in the top swim lane entitled metrics. There are three middle swim lanes designating job titles. With this type of workflow documentation, it is very clear who is to perform each work step, with supplemental information as needed to make those work steps easy to understand. Truly, without workflow definition, many organizations are using hope as a strategy. That strategy is both inconsistent in results and contains large amounts of risk. It is impossible to train to a standard that does not exist.

Who needs this training?

Once we have defined workflow, it becomes very easy to understand who needs to be involved in the training.

Those people who have executable steps, or management oversight of the steps, should be involved in the training.

How is the training program created?

Training programs should always begin with a discussion about why the training is important, this was defined in question number one. Next, the discussion around the benefit to the individual attendee, as well as the benefit to the organization if we learn to do this process extremely well. That was defined in question number two. Only after thorough discussion of why it is important and what the benefits are for doing it well, should the how be discussed. The how of any given process is the workflow itself, broken down into the goals statements established previously. The workflow is designed to create consistency and transparency and performance so that any given important process in your construction organization is done in line with the expectations depicted. It is always the best practice to record a training session so that it can be viewed again via video and/or

audio at a later date. This will ensure a higher learning retention rate since the resource does not simply disappear after the training has ended.

How will we know if this training is successful?

In the goal statement discussed above, the clarity of the desired result has been defined. Creating a benchmark of performance prior to the training as well as trending improvements after the training will allow clarity behind the success of the initiative itself. The desired output is to use data to measure the success, not gut feel or assumption. Best practice would be to share these improvements with the team that is working so hard to make the improvements happen. It is critical to take time to celebrate the win, so that the team can utilize the win as fuel for the next improvement initiative desired.

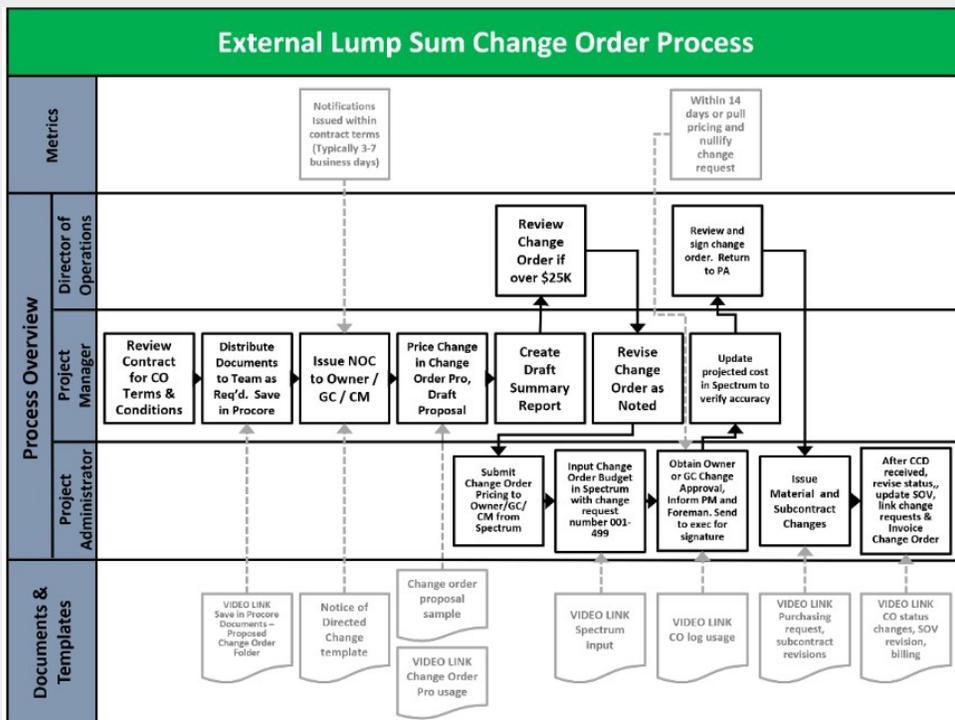
Who will lead the training and in what format?

Many times, training should be led by a peer or by someone who is one step above those who will be in the training. Avoid utilizing trainers who

are not subject matter experts in the topic or are too far removed from the actual work the training is centering around. Proper trainers lend credibility, humor, and context to the messaging, making it more powerful and much better received. Small group training is almost always the desired format when group training is required. One-on-one training, or mentoring programs, are also highly effective ways of delivering content. The subject itself would lend itself to the correct path of delivery.

Summary

Creating synergy of people process and technology cannot be accomplished with a Band-Aid approach of generic training. It is a strategic initiative that allows the organization to define if the training is needed due to a definable gap in learning, skill, or intrinsic knowledge. If training is required, following the steps outlined above will allow the creation of defined process, role definition, and workflow. These tools, when implemented effectively via training and documentation, will allow much greater consistency in performance and predictability of output.



About the author



Stephane McShane, Director at Maxim Consulting Group, is responsible for the evaluation and implementation processes with our

clients. Stephane works with construction related firms of all sizes to evaluate business practices and assist with management challenges. Her areas of expertise include: Leadership development, organizational assessments, strategic planning, project execution, business development, productivity improvement, and training programs. Mrs. McShane is an internationally recognized speaker, mentor, author, and teacher.